

THE ABENG

A Journal of Transdisciplinary Criticism

Vol. 4 • No. 1 • 2020

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Articles

Word count: 5,000 (approximately)
Abstract: 150 words

Review Essays / Comments / In the News

Word count: 1,000 to 2,000 (approximately)
Abstract: 50-75 words

File Format: Microsoft Word (Times New Roman, 12 point, Left Justified, Double-spaced)

Citations Format: Endnotes

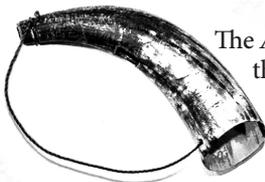
Citations Style: Chicago Manual of Style (latest edition)

Materials must not have been submitted elsewhere.

For all other types of submissions (alternate media formats including audio and video, interviews, etc) please contact the editor.

Send submissions and inquiries to:
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The *Abeng* (A-beng) refers to a kind of animal horn used in the African diaspora to facilitate communication within communities of maroons.

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Foreword

This volume of *THE ABENG* includes the Director's Address delivered in Memphis, TN at the ISS Fourth Annual Meeting 2019 (with corrections and slight revisions). The other material included constitute the contributions of the ongoing project called *Scripturalizing Here and There*. This project should be understood as an ethnography of scriptures. It includes short but compelling summary descriptions of scripturalizing as types of mimetic social- cultural performances with some of the psychosocial and cultural-politics dynamics and ramifications appertaining thereto.

Responses to the essay and to the ethnographic submissions are invited. We would like to use the contributions as springboard for ongoing wide-ranging exchanges about "discourse and/as power," about the "work we make scriptures do..." I hope all readers will agree these are compelling matters for our times around the world.

NOTE: ISS Fifth Annual Meeting, originally scheduled to be held in Toronto in April 2020, has on account of the worldwide spread of the Corona Virus been cancelled. We are working on alternate possibilities for conversation or types of exchanges. Thanks for your patience and consideration and support. In the meantime, Please stay safe. All of you are needed to challenge others and to model what type of conversation is worth having, what type of intellectual and social orientation is required.

V. L. Wimbush



SEMINAR TOPIC
Classification

EVENING RECEPTION
Thursday

SEMINAR
Friday & Saturday

LOCATION
Courtyard
Memphis
Downtown

75 Jefferson Avenue
Memphis, TN 38103

INSTITUTE FOR SIGNIFYING SCRIPTURES
EXCAVATING DISC



Courtyard by Marriot Memphis Downtown, TN
Site of the fourth Annual Meeting

“WHO COUNTS’(?):
SCRIPTURALIZATION AS CLASSIFICATION”

DIRECTOR’S ADDRESS

FOURTH

ISS ANNUAL MEETING

FEBRUARY, 2019

MEMPHIS, TN

Vincent L Wimbush

...[She’s] not qualified[,] [She’s] weak on crime...

[He’s a] strong man...[He’s] tough on crime

—Trump on Stacey Abrams and Brian Kemp
Competitors in GA Governor’s Race 2018

She is an outstanding person who is strong on the Border,
Crime, Military.../He “doesn’t fit...

—Trump on Cindy Hyde-Smith and Mike Espy
Competitors in MS U.S. senate race 2018

In Florida there is a choice between a Harvard/Yale educated man
named @RonDeSantisFL who has been a great Congressman and
will be a great Governor—and a Dem who is a thief and who is

Mayor of poorly run Tallahassee, said to be one of the most corrupt cities in the Country!

—Trump tweet on Andrew Gillam and / Ron De Santis
FL Governor's Race, 2018

These strongly-worded sentiments come out of the dramas and traumas that we here in the U.S. called the recent 2018 midterm elections. The latter term is shorthand reference to U.S. election events—at several levels in different types of jurisdictions—in non-presidential election years. They traditionally present opportunities for corrections/adjustments to the most recent previous presidential election. For whom in the U.S. or in other parts of the world—including and beginning with our closest neighbors, Canada and Mexico, and radiating therefrom far and wide—does it not register that 2016 was our last and rather fateful and incredible presidential campaign and election year? Based as it was on rhetorical hyperbole and outlandishness hardly surpassed in the lifetime of any alive today, most of us are still reeling from it, wondering what on any given day may come next: Another shutdown of government, or, perhaps, the persistent threat of a government shutdown as one of the signs of the ongoing toxicity in our polity and society?

Noteworthy about the 2018 midterms were the types of outrageous gestures made and violent rhetorics spewed by Trump to advance certain candidates of his liking. These were efforts to exploit and exacerbate deep and persistent psycho-social-cultural and political fault lines, categories, or names that define us and show us how we are categorized and ordered. Such categorization and ordering may at times assures us; at other times it provokes and frightens and threatens us, and stoking anxiety and animosity. What appears significant for our consideration—that is, for the consideration of a group of friends committed to thinking and wrestling honestly and earnestly together about how and why things are and came to be inscribed as they are and what we might

do about such (a good way to understand what ISS is and must continue to be about)—are the rhetorical formations of Trump and some other contemporary public officials. (“Strongmen” the latter are sometimes called here in the U. S. and in other parts of the world. Consider Russia; Turkey; Saudi Arabia; Israel; Venezuela; several situations in Africa.) I have in mind how he and others tend to name and categorize and isolate individuals and groups. As critical theorists of the scriptural and its politics, we must always be alert to the continuous not always subtle efforts among such figures to impose, to exploit, to exacerbate the crude, violent historical and ongoing inscribing, ordering and classification, the type-ing and hierarchical-izing, of peoples throughout the world as part of a type of violence.

What is at work if not the scratching of the historical and persistent wounding of certain peoples of the U.S. (especially, but also reflected in other parts of the world) when Trump crudely and bluntly exclaimed that his preferred candidate (white/mostly male/same party affiliation) is such and such—(strong/tough on crime/smart, and so forth)--and the other candidate (of the other party/a person of color/sometimes male, sometimes female) is the exact subpar opposite of his (that is, weak/not a good fit/unqualified, and so forth)? What in such rhetorics is he playing with, trading on? Here we have striking examples and quickening of the adage—recovered by philologist F. Max Müller and applied in the consolidation of the spoils of the modern colonial period—“classify and conquer.” Trump was (re)drawing tropes and stereotypes about differences between peoples in the system of classification as hierarchicalization—or subduing the others—that has long defined the West. For a number of reasons—none or very few of them ennobling or honest—the direct and open verbal articulations of the harsh racial and gender classifications in the West have lately on the whole been somewhat muted, covered up by different sorts of deflections, denials, subtleties, and codes. But then enters Trump, who as bull elephant in the all-is-well, all-are-equal discursive-political masking shop ironically wreaks both political success and havoc.

Why is this phenomenon so important to our thinking and conversation about the scriptural? I should like to suggest that the

matter goes beyond establishing classification as an odd phenomenon in the historical constitution of the modern world we know and experience that Trump as an odd person in our present digs up and exploits. At stake are power and the order of social relations, power in the order of social relations that obtained before, obtains still, and will obtain beyond and long after Trump. What Trump dramatically exposed was not only in place before he assumed the political stage, it was in place in several if not all domains of modern life. The ubiquity of the phenomenon should provoke heightened awareness on our part and a commitment to responding accordingly.

The problem having to do with classification is everywhere in evidence—in politics; education; science; religion; and so forth. Science has long been embroiled in the matter. In spite of attempts to cover up its history of leadership and onus in this arena a weak (or honest) link shows up to push back the curtain/veil. Consider the Nobel-winning biologist James D. Watson, who did pioneering work on the structure of DNA (the Human Genome Project). It was reported that in a conversation with a British journalist in 2007 he shared that he remained “inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa” because “our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours, whereas all the testing says, not really” (*New York Times*, Amy Harmon, Jan 1, 2019). In a PBS documentary “American Masters: Decoding Watson” broadcast in January 2019 Watson was asked whether his views on linkages between race and intelligence had changed: “Not at all. I would like for them to have changed, that there be new knowledge that says that your nurture is much more important than nature. But I haven’t seen any knowledge. And there’s a difference on the average between blacks and whites on I.Q. tests...the difference is genetic” (Harmon, *NYT*).

In his memoir *Avoid Boring People: Lessons from a Life in Science* (published in 2007), with its title channeling the humility that marks scientists of the twentieth century, he made the following strong statement:

A priori, there is no firm reason to anticipate that the intellectual capacities of peoples geographically separated in

their evolution should prove to have evolved identically.

The roiling around Watson and his strong sentiments and pronouncements and beyond Watson in regard to matters of race and intelligence—with black peoples position on the rung--continues. But a final note here about what is most striking and unsettling about the Watson example: not only might his sentiment not represent the minority view among scientists, but some scientists, it is suggested, seem to understand that Watson exposes himself as an outlier, not simply in terms of his personal eccentricity or the ravages of dementia or in terms of his substantive views and sentiments held about race and intelligence, but in terms of not holding such views and sentiments “close [enough] to the vest.” That is to say, in making “public” the views held by many beyond him, Watson showed himself to be incompetent not so much in terms of the science but in being impolitic.

A different but sometimes overlapping domain, that of demography, practiced by scientists of all types, including social scientists and students of public policy as it intersects with and is made to serve politics and government, opens an especially wide even if disturbing window. Demographers tell on us in regard to our deep existential anxieties and fears, and so on, more than they tell us the facts about things. So consider the glimpse the discipline provides into our collective psyche as we turn to the issue of the trend in the explosive increase in difference in U.S. population. The revelation of the trend—toward the loss of majority in number on the part of the white population--clearly leads to anxiety on the part of whites as historical majority dominants, anxiety specifically over the historical center, and the category/classification appertaining thereto, no longer holding.

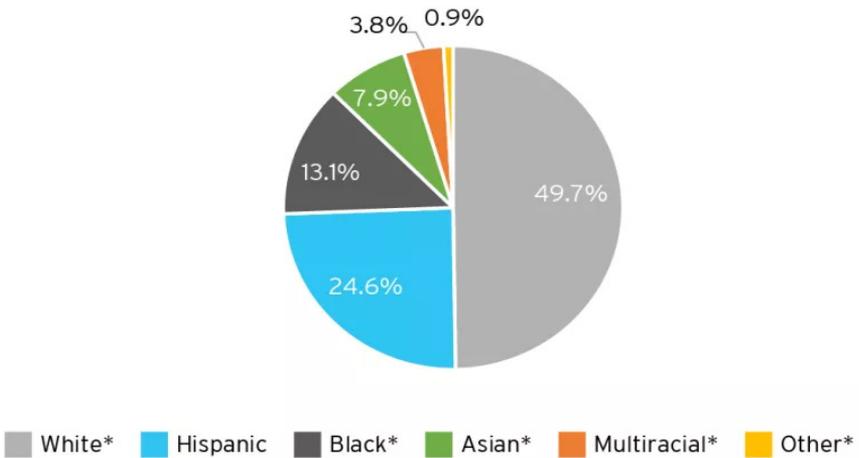
In an article written published in the *New York Times* in November 2018, “Why the Announcement of a Looming White Minority Makes Demographers Nervous,” Sabrina Tavernise provides insight into classification anxiety, anxiety over the changes in relative position of the various social categories—how they have struck nerves, the work they do, what they might portend. All of this of course reflects the thick and layered history of what I call the

freighted psycho-socio-logics, or (following the provocative work of Nidesh Lawtoo who followed the theoretics of French philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe), the “patho(-)logics” as response on the part of dominant-majority whites in the face of the very scary prospect of whites as a group becoming a minority group or at least no longer a clear and convincing majority solely in terms of numbers, wealth, and political power. The simple movement and prospect of a shift of this sort throws many from indifference to anxiety to a sense of real crisis. The graphic of the sort included here that draws on the work and conclusions of the Census Bureau (CB) report make the point; according to Tavernise, it “made demographic change look like a zero-sum game that white Americans were losing...”

Fig. 1

FIGURE 1

Racial profile of U.S. population, 2045



* Non-Hispanic members of race

Source: William H Frey analysis of U.S. Census population projections released March 13, 2018 and revised September 6, 2018

B Metropolitan Policy Program
at BROOKINGS

The report so disturbed former Census Bureau director

turned academic Kenneth Prewitt that he feared it “could provoke a political backlash.” “Statistics are powerful,” Prewitt opined, “[they] are a description of who we are as a country. If you say majority-minority, that becomes a huge fact in the national discourse.”

Prewitt is joined by other academics, especially social scientists, many of whom question the government’s use of “race” in federal research projects; they question not only how such research is used, but also the lack of critical orientation to the categories themselves. Some also despair over the effects of the research—“scaring the hell out of white people”—and sharply question whether we get a “true picture” of the present situation or the possible or likely future. At issue, some researchers say, is “whom the government counts as white.” Most interesting to note is the fact that in CB projections people of mixed race or ethnicity have been counted mostly as “minority.” Dr. Mary Waters, sociologist at Harvard, sharpened the question before us, hardly reading like a scientist of the social: “...[there] are all these people who look white, act white, marry white and live white, so what does white even mean anymore?”

It is acknowledged that the topic of population projections was not given the type and degree of attention that is now common and broad-based until mid to late 2008—around the time when the prospect of Obama becoming president appeared to be a real possibility. (Although some think the heightened anxiety should be traced to the 1965 Voting Rights Act.) There was in many places conversation about even fixation on the projection that non-Hispanic whites would drop below 50% by 2042, earlier than previously projected. “That’s what really lit the fuse”—so stated Dr. Dowell Myers, demographer at USC. “People went crazy.” But Myers and colleagues learned, as social scientists may sometimes slowly come to learn—that the way the data were presented made a difference in regard to difference: “negative effects that came from reading about a white decline were largely erased when the same people read about how the white category was in fact getting bigger by absorbing multiracial young people through intermarriage.”

“Race,” Tavernise wisely argues, is a most difficult category

to grasp (beyond the most tightly wrapped group prejudices), much less a stable social category to count, because “it” “shifts with changes in culture, immigration, and ideas about genetics. So who counts as white has changed over time...” So, take note of those who came to the U.S. as immigrants from Europe in the 1910s and 1920s. “Eventually, ...immigrants from eastern and southern Europe came to be considered white.” Consider today those whom the border wall is intended to keep out.

Why is race beyond group patho-logics so elusive? Because, argues Dr. Charles King, political scientist, Georgetown University, “race is about power, not biology. The closer you get to social power, the closer you get to whiteness...” He made it shockingly clear that in U.S. history the one group that was never allowed to “cross the line into whiteness was African-Americans...—the long-term legacy of slavery.”

We are, according to Dr. Richard Alba, sociologist, CUNY, with the CB projections, stuck in an outdated classification system, in which we assign “nonwhite label” to most people having both mixed ancestry. This binds us to the insanity and perversity of “the one-drop rule,” a nineteenth century system of racial classification, in which having even one African ancestor meant you were black. Many if not most numbers analysts have come to understand that the numbers should “have many interpretations,” and that the “white-versus-everyone-else” as the only interpretation is problematic representing, in my view a most insidious and tight psychical and cultural-ideological bondage.

The multiple interpretations of demographic and of (self) representation and racial identity can be seen poignantly and starkly in a recent piece in the *Washington Post* entitled “I am Who I Am: Kamala Harris, Daughter of Indian and Jamaican Immigrants, defines herself simply as ‘American’” (Kevin Sullivan, Feb 2, 2019). Senator Harris sets out in the glare of public life that is national politics to argue for a type of complexity and fluidity in terms of representation. She is said not to have spent much time “dwelling on how to categorize” herself:

...when I first ran for office that was one of the things I

struggled with, which is that you are forced through that process to define yourself in a way that you fit neatly into the compartment that other people have created. My point was: I am who I am. I'm good with it. You need to figure it out, but I'm fine with it.

Alas... Is she conceding the fact of race as an historically and clearly persistent insidious fulcrum for construction and its maintenance of difference, and all that difference brings on in terms of social and other forms of power? Or does she think she has freedom toward race-identity-fluidity?

The work of theorists of gender—a similar complex fulcrum for construction —is informative here. In addition to the well-known and highly regarded work of Judith Butler, I have recently found illuminating and rather provocative the work of biologist and historian of science Anne Fausto-Sterling. Her book *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Reality* (2000) throws much light on the fraught and sometimes even violent history of conflict over the constructedness of gender and--like race--the work it is made to do as a guarantor of the politics of fixedness (note: which in its troubling formulation goes back as far as colonial Virginia's Governor William Gooch (and his disturbing words about how to exert and maintain control over black peoples with colorful imagery about manipulating them like wax...). We should take note of her discussion in her chapter One ("Dueling Dualisms") that surveys the long histories of conflict over different kinds and degrees of difference that could be imagined and countenanced and tolerated. The discussion is most aptly summarized in a cartoon and graphic included below: (Cf p. 11—fig 1.1: cartoon history of sex and gender; fig 1.2: Model A=essentialism; Model B=constructionism)

¹¹ Ed. V. L. Wimbush (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

¹² See his *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973]).

Fig. 2



FIGURE 1.1: A cartoon history of sex and gender. (Source: Diane DiMassa, for the author)

Fig. 3

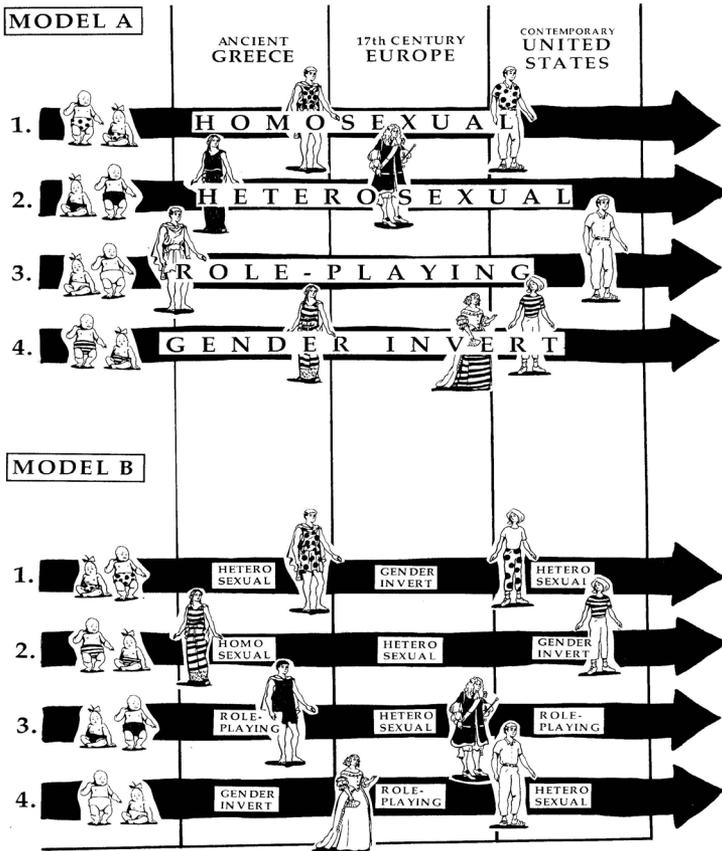


FIGURE 1.2: *Model A*: Reading *essentialism* from the historical record. A person with inborn homosexual tendencies would be homosexual, no matter what historical era. *Model B*: Reading *constructionism* from the historical record. A person of a particular genetic make-up might or might not become homosexual, depending on the culture and historical period in which he or she was raised. (Source: Alyce Santoro, for the author)

Readers should take note of a sharp concluding argument by Fausto-Sterling that is most difficult to gainsay and impossible to avoid in any discussion regarding classification:

The term “sex” has at least two meanings. When referring to reproduction, it is true that as a species, humans have binary gametes—there are eggs and there are sperm. But if we move from sex cells to whole human beings, whom the Tile IX rule changes propose to label as either male or female (a second use of the word “sex”), we lose the certainty of binary classification.

(Facebook Entry, November 2, 2018)

We might think of the Trump administration’s recent ruling that bars transgendered persons from serving in the military as one of the latest big-stage examples of a rather despicable effort to freeze gender as category or classification in place—or sadly, literally *out* of place. This was done clearly as reflection of and for the sake of a certain politics of stability and discrimination. But it is even more important for us to recognize this move as part of a shameful game and to relate it to historical and ongoing efforts among human beings everywhere and in every domain to “classify and conquer.” Further, it is important to come to see that this phenomenon is in many quarters—too many!--protected, masked, or veiled. I have, as some of you know, called it--in heightened awareness of how the term has been used in history, including colonial history--a kind of “magic,” mystification (see *White Men’s Magic*). The combination of the effort to freeze in place and to mystify all the dynamics around such effort is what we might with some theoretical and analytical profit term “scripturalization.” Profit because it ties together phenomena and dynamics that otherwise—in terms of the traditional shortcomings and syndromes of disciplinarity--would be kept separate and thereby underestimated, misunderstood, and misidentified. So the term helps us understand that it refers not to a simple thing or object but to dynamics, workings, and that its workings are far outside the traditional post-Enlightenment-era domain and role accorded to “religion.” Gender, race, and a host of psycho-socio-cultural and political-economic issues are relevant here.

Hear these most ineloquent and rather scary but nonetheless haunting words as faithful rendering of the politics of the modern scriptural:

Some have suggested a barrier is immoral. Then why do wealthy politicians build walls, fences, and gates around their homes? They don't build walls because they hate the people on the outside, but because they love the people on the inside. The only thing that is immoral is [for] the politicians to do nothing and continue to allow more innocent people to be so horribly victimized.

---Trump, re: The Wall, Address to Nation, Tuesday, January 8, 2019

With such words and sentiments we find the registration of nationalist scriptures, here disturbingly recited by one who has shockingly already assumed the highest office in a scriptural-constitutional polity, in what I suggest is the most complexly developed model of modern-world scripturalization. It is not surprising then to read and hear words from the leader of such a polity—words that harden construction of one group of humans against another. Here is the politics of managing the Others. A powerful politics, indeed, that has deep roots in history. What else can we make of the phenomenon of blackface, of the taunting of a presidential candidate with the sobriquet “Pocahontas,” of the obsession with the Wall to keep at bay those on the outside? Take note of another remarkably unsubtle utterance of the politics at stake:

Fig. 4



Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

Following

Gallup Poll: “Open Borders will potentially attract 42 million Latin Americans.” This would be a disaster for the U.S. We need the Wall now!

10:24 AM - 10 Feb 2019

Classify and separate. Classify and humiliate. Classify and conquer. More correct than he knew, Levi-Strauss's point about the impetus for writing (and we extend such technology to include the whole range of systems of discursivity that mark our times), having to do with registering/recording (and we would this year add therewith naturally ordering/classifying) is chillingly true. We humans always classify. We scripturalize in order to facilitate our classifying. We invent scriptures to hold classifications—including our own practices and politics and their psychologies--in place, to freeze, naturalize, canonize them. There is no easy out. Our world as several critics and scholars have observed has become a world that is constructed or molded—like “soft wax” (note: Abbe Demagnet)—out of stereotyped Others, including racialized Others and females, as “fixed reality, fantasy and fetish” (Zohreh T. Sullivan, “Race, Gender, and Imperial Ideology in the Nineteenth Century,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 13:1 [1989] 25). Such work—classification--is an important part, if not the most important part, of the legacy of scriptural cultures and societies. From male and female to sheep and goat to the faithful and the infidel and so many other competing and conflicting dyads, we are encouraged and manipulated to see and think and relate accordingly.

It would seem that it is our need to divide/classify and conquer things (or “the Other”) that leads to among other dynamics and actions the invention/sanctification of texts/scriptures, which we in turn “forget” we have invented so to facilitate our obfuscation of what we have set up and ordered as the nature of things. To be a scriptural formation is to be embedded in and become an agent of the politics of classification. With focus on classification we are challenged to see ourselves as scripture users/wielders. If we are readers we are such then not so much of letters or texts but in ironic and layered and coded terms, as Sojourner Truth said of her “reading” of “men [women] and nations.” The men, women, and nations are almost always read in terms of their relative status or classification. This makes the reading of the scriptural a powerful human activity, a site of contestation and power dynamics because it is always about classification.

Also at stake here for most of those who might be in con-

versation with us is power and freedom *not* to be counted, *not* to be classified, *not* to be placed in that “strange system of human society” that turns around, as Shelley’s monster learned, reading in her society “the division of property...of rank, descent, and blood” (note: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*). So as a part of our challenge in analysis there must henceforth be deep and expansive and self-sensitive excavation of the scriptural and of the human-making with its ordering and ranking in relation to such.

As a final point of reflection I should like to indicate that I have in the last few years turned for help with such a challenge to the well-known Martinican novelist, essayist/critic/poet Édouard Glissant (1928-2011). He speaks to me and to many others still and perhaps ever more loudly and profoundly about the danger and tragedy of the molding/flattening and reductions of human beings, the attempt to make them simple and transparent as a kind of violence. He was a fierce advocate for resistance in terms of a refusal to be molded and flattened, classified, and made transparent. He made pleas for the holding onto and relishing our individual and collective thickness. Note in his *Poétique de la Relation* arresting arguments about opacity and self-formation and social relations:

If we examine the process of “understanding” people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency...I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce.

Accepting differences does, of course, upset the hierarchy... I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within the system. I create you afresh—But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction.

Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclo-

sure within an impenetrable autarchy...*Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics.* To understand these truly one must focus on *the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components...* The right to opacity would not establish autism; it would be the real foundation of Relation, in freedoms... We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone (*nous réclamons pour tous le droit à l'opacité....*) (trans. Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 189-194).

Opacity—we might with Glissant think of it as part of the cure for the turbulences and violence of the work of classification, which remains a profound part of the psychosocial and pathological work of the scriptural.

SCRIPTURALIZING HERE AND THERE

Inner Resources, a brief submission

By: Jacqueline M. Hidalgo

Description of scripturalizing (who, what, when, where)

Inner Resources, a mural on the wall of City Terrace Park gym in a predominantly ethnic Mexican residential area of Los Angeles. Painted by Paul Botelló along with “at-risk youth” from the LA County Probation Department, Botelló wanted to depict “the veneration of life.”¹ Botelló identifies with a second generation of Chicano muralists. The mural was ceremonially dedicated on July 22, 2000.² In this image, Nahua myths and images are combined with images of the New Jerusalem from the Book of Revelation as well as other images drawn from Mexican and USA culture.



Paul Botelló's Inner Resources in City Terrace
Photo Credit: Sourena Parham

1. Los Angeles County Arts Commission, “Inner Resources,” Civic Art, <https://www.lacountyarts.org/civcart/objects-1/info/27>.

2. Gisela María Latorre, “Chicana/o Murals of California: Indigenist Aesthetics and the Politics of Space, 1970-2000” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003), 114.

Genealogy/evolution (whence; previous representations)

Many contexts can be thought of in relationship to this mural. For instance, we could think about the power and import of murals in Latin American traditions, particularly the socially and politically conscious Mexican muralist movement of the 1920s, but also the mural traditions of East LA since the 1960s activism of students and artistic collectives. This mural draws on representations of Mexican gods and goddesses, and central to the image is an adaptation of a famous statue of Coatlicue (c. 1500) now housed in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City; the figure now stands as a “Mother Earth.” A representation of a Nahua temple can be found in the background in between two buildings of Spanish colonial architecture. The image also signals the revived Garden of Eden at the center of Revelation’s New Jerusalem (Rev. 21). An urban landscape flanks a central garden with the trees of knowledge and of life as well as the flowing river of the water of the life that emanates from the temple. The New Jerusalem was also an important Spanish colonial image, a basis for mission design and urban planning under Spanish rule.

Analysis

Representation/performance/poetics

Botelló’s remarks at the dedication suggested that a concern with spirituality in the midst of environmental racism and imminent environmental disasters were central to the making of this mural (and this was in the year 2000). It is an intentionally hybrid representation, transforming Christian and non-Christian Mexican traditions by bringing them together here. The mural is called “inner resources” so as to suggest that these traditions serve as inner resources through which to survive and renew the world. Botelló also described at the dedication his wish to represent a communion between diverse human and non-human animals in this image as a way of imagining an alternate ecology.

Power issues/type, directionality of mimetic (whose scripturalization? Who’s scripturalized whom)

An ethnic Mexican scripturalizing of both biblical and indigenous traditions, this mural may also be seen as signifying on the very concept of *mestizaje*, a fusing of indigenous and European histories and traditions. Thus, it participates in East LA mural traditions that represent ethnic pride in defiance of negative stereotypes about Mexican peoples of mixed racial descent. The mural takes up the colonial vision of the New Jerusalem and turns it around, challenging dominant USA cultural marginalization of working-class urban centers and depicting them instead as spaces of possibility for world renewal. Rather than a gated city with a garden at its center, the city and the garden intertwine, and diverse peoples occupy spaces all around the image instead of simply worshipping at the center of the city. The mural also makes indigenous traditions central to the vision (overt non-indigenous Christian symbols are absent except through the evocation of colonial architecture) and resists anthropocentric hierarchies in paradise. Yet valorization of *mestizaje* may also encode its own histories of racialized domination, particularly a Mexican nationalist deployment that worked to eliminate living indigenous communities while denying the presence of African and Asian diasporic communities. The turn to Nahuatl traditions can erase the diverse indigenous heritages of different contemporary Mexicans. It may also encode a myth of progress, via José Vasconcelos, that comes through blending traditions, but this myth can obscure the violence that led to the blending of these traditions in the first place. A turn to Coatlicue, rather than Guadalupe, as the central image of this mural attempts to subvert the patriarchal norms and presumed Spanish dominance of traditional tropes of *mestizaje*.

Consequences/situation to date

The mural still exists, and people still visit this mural as an important example of art in the East LA landscape. Yet the broader socio-political circumstances of environmental degradation and dominant USA antipathy towards Mexicans seems to have actually worsened since the time this mural was inaugurated.

Scripturalizing (Digital) Data

By Susanne Scholz

General Description of Scripturalizing Dynamic(s)/Practice(s)/Event(s) (who, what, when, where)

Every person with a smart phone, a Facebook account, a Google search, a Macy's account, or any other digital footprint activity participates in leaving behind data. All digitized corporations, banks, companies, and businesses operating digital devices such as Nest, Alexa, or apps collect every person's data as part of the growing data surveillance business, in which data is sold in the secondary market place. Data collecting companies gather behavioral data to make money off it. In other words, everybody becomes the source of raw data from which corporations make money; they also plan and create the behaviorist future market with everybody's data collected over time. At the same time, users pay to buy the various digital devices and services without controlling their personal data, which they sign away in countless digital agreement forms. According to Shoshana Suboff, "the apotheosis of behavioral data use" is Alexa, as it produces a never-ending reinvestment cycle of data on people in their own homes.

Genealogy/Evolution (whence, previous representations)

The following quote comes from the Wikipedia on "data," as of February 17, 2019:

"The first English use of the word 'data' is from the 1640s. The word 'data' was first used to mean 'transmissible and storable computer information' in 1946. The expression 'data processing' was first used in 1954.[5]

The Latin word *data* is the plural of *datum*, '(thing) given,' neuter past participle of *dare* 'to give'. [5] Data may be used as a plural noun in this sense, with some writers—usually scientific writers—in the 20th century using *datum* in the singular and *data* for plural. However, over the course of time this usage has vanished from the English language,

and everyday writing, ‘data’ is most commonly used in the singular, as a mass noun (like ‘information’, ‘sand’ or ‘rain’). [6]”

“Data (/ˈdeɪtə/ DAY-tə, /ˈdætə/ DAT-ə, /ˈdɑːtə/ DAH-tə)[1] is a set of values of subjects with respect to qualitative or quantitative variables.

Data and information or knowledge are often used interchangeably; however data becomes information when it is viewed in context or in post-analysis [2]. While the concept of data is commonly associated with scientific research, data is collected by a huge range of organizations and institutions, including businesses (e.g., sales data, revenue, profits, stock price), governments (e.g., crime rates, unemployment rates, literacy rates) and non-governmental organizations (e.g., censuses of the number of homeless people by non-profit organizations).

Data is measured, collected and reported, and analyzed, whereupon it can be visualized using graphs, images or other analysis tools. Data as a general concept refers to the fact that some existing information or knowledge is *represented* or *coded* in some form suitable for better usage or processing. *Raw data* (‘unprocessed data’) is a collection of numbers or characters before it has been ‘cleaned’ and corrected by researchers. Raw data needs to be corrected to remove outliers or obvious instrument or data entry errors (e.g., a thermometer reading from an outdoor Arctic location recording a tropical temperature). Data processing commonly occurs by stages, and the ‘processed data’ from one stage may be considered the ‘raw data’ of the next stage. Field data is raw data that is collected in an uncontrolled ‘in situ’ environment. Experimental data is data that is generated within the context of a scientific investigation by observation and recording. Data has been described as the new oil of the digital economy.[3][4]”

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data>

“Data” is, of course, also the renowned character in Star Trek: The Next Generation ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data_\(Star_Trek\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data_(Star_Trek))). An AI android, he is unable to feel emotions, which becomes Data’s central goal during his time at the Federation starship USS Enterprise-E.

Increasingly, data is seen as the raw material to discover patterns that allow researchers to get to the “truth” of whatever the investigation is, whether in the field of marketing, science, or any kind of argumentation that aims to convince somebody of something. Even degree programs at colleges and universities are popping up to teach students how to collect data, how to analyze it, and what do with it.

The central question is: How to interpret data and for what purpose(s)?

Data is thus accepted as the source for “truth” that will enable people to discern what needs to be done about a situation, problem, or thing under consideration. As the Wikipedia entry on “data” explains: “These patterns in data are seen as information which can be used to enhance knowledge. These patterns may be interpreted as ‘truth’ (though ‘truth’ can be a subjective concept), and may be authorized as aesthetic and ethical criteria in some disciplines or cultures” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data>).

The interpretation of data is the central task in making sense of the gathered information. Algorithms that underlie the gathering methods appear to be the central hermeneutical design element in the gathering process. While the gathering of data is recognized as being situated and biased by the interests of the data-gatherers, algorithms are often defined as “an unambiguous specification of how to solve a class of problems” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithm>).

Analysis

Representation/Performance/Poetics

Whenever one uses one's phone, browses on the internet, buys goods or services with a credit card at a store or online, submit one's medical or other personal records, provides one's DNA record for tracing one's lineage, has Alexa or a smart TV at home, installs various apps at home and elsewhere, relies on a fitbit, or signs up for something somewhere online, one's data is stored at a mega-corporation such as Google or Facebook and their various subsidiaries. Nobody knows where one's data goes, reappears, is sold, and part of the next digital product or service. Currently, data collection is designed to be untraceable, hidden, secret, and undecipherable. Most people do not think about their data, but when they are asked, they prefer to know about its whereabouts and they like to control it. Yet, according to experts, alternatives to the current data situation are vanishing. We are experiencing a market failure. Although most people do not want to give away their data to unknown second and even tertiary markets, their demand goes unheard. People want transparency and to give permission to have their data collected so that services would be improved to them individually. But the supply of data and the responses to data come from behavior future market companies. In other words, the demand from the people is erased from the equation of supply and demand. People's demands do not count while the demand is on the market supply (data companies), which are a global group of users who use the "raw material" of data to build their companies (corporations). Zuboff sees in this market failure a "world historic opportunity" for selling to dissatisfied customers on the basis of transparent and permission-given data collection processes.

Are experts like Zuboff hoping for a "Democratic Reformation" based on a different, non-exploitative use of data?

Power Issues/Type, Directionality of Mimetics (whose scripturalization? who is scripturalized by whom)

Deregulated mega-corporations and their secondary

markets control the data collection processes. Customers are on their mercy, signing away their legal rights in countless privacy and user agreements. Individuals, population segments, and entire countries turn into raw materials for the data farming practices. In turn, people's habits and daily-life practices are analyzed according to secret paradigms and standards to be sold to the secondary market which produces advertisement, marketing campaigns, and digital products to sell and further exploit the population in an endless circle. People pay for digital products or use "for free" digital services that become increasingly imbedded in everyday life (think smart TVs) from which it becomes increasingly impossible to extract oneself, except for desert nuns and monks.

Consequences/Situation to Date

Books, such as Shoshana Suboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2019), or Mark Zuckerberg's appearances before the US Congress and the EU Parliament, have brought public awareness to the extent of the data-farming practices and their implications on each person's privacy. Suboff and other experts recommend both market and government solutions that are grounded in a new paradigm to regulate and outlaw deceptive, secret, and hidden behaviorist data collection. To them, nothing less than the democratic infrastructure of society is at stake.

Bloodstain-Pattern Analysis

By Katie Van Heest

Description of scripturalizing (who, what, when, where)

Bloodstain-pattern analysis (BPA) is a branch of forensic science that aims to reconstruct the course, timing, and extent of violent events from blood deposits and spatter. Analysts consider the size of stains, shapes of stains, the degree of clotting

and presence of other fluids, the angle or direction in which the blood seemed to be projected, and so forth. Knowledge required for competent interpretation of bloodstains includes mastery of relevant terminology; familiarity with applied mathematics; skill with equipment like lasers, luminol, digital cameras, and technical software; wound pathology; and the physics of fluid transfer. Bloodstain-pattern analysts work within and alongside the criminal justice system, providing training, working crime scenes, and giving expert witness in trials.

Genealogy/evolution (whence; previous representations)

At least informally, the practice has existed for centuries, as bloodstains are an often-obvious kind of physical evidence attending crime, but in recent decades the field has formalized and become more legally consequential. Late in the twentieth century, US courts began regularly admitting BPA testimony as expert evidence, to be considered by jurors alongside the physical evidence itself. Criminalist Herbert Leon MacDonnell is often credited with formalizing the field, starting with Department of Justice-funded set of experiments culminating in a 1971 report on stain patterns. The trainings MacDonnell subsequently launched became a model in the discipline, and now anyone, including law enforcement, can enroll in professional-development-style courses provided by independent consultants. Completion of even a short training usually confers some type of certification qualifying one to offer expert testimony.

Analysis

Representation/performance/poetics

Bloodstain-pattern analysts visit crime scenes; examine, document, and test physical evidence; consult with law enforcement and/or defense teams; write technical reports; and if called, testify in court on the basis of their findings. And yet an extensive 2009 National Academy of Sciences report on forensic sciences says that the two major professional societies in bloodstain-pattern

analysis misguidedly “emphasize experience over scientific foundations” and that “the opinions of . . . analysts are more subjective than scientific.”

Expert testimony (a kind of evidence) can be generated from this analysis of physical evidence (bloodstains), but ProPublica investigative journalist Pamela Colloff says “no studies back up the finding that you can . . . reverse-engineer a crime scene from these stains.” People with the same exact training can look at the same physical evidence and come to “diametrically opposite conclusions about what happened.”

Power issues/type, directionality of mimetics (whose scripturalization? Who’s scripturalized whom)

Colloff has heard criminal defense attorneys liken BPA to divining messages with a Ouija board. From her own experience of going through a forty-hour training course in the practice, Colloff “came to see that bloodstain pattern analysis . . . has the trappings of science but it doesn’t have any statistical foundations. There’s no error rate, there are minimal studies that have been done. This is really an interpretive endeavor.”

BPA has given an empirical sheen to the crime-scene reconstructions put forward by law enforcement and prosecutors and given criminal defendants with means the opportunity to bolster their own cases, as they can hire analysts as expert witnesses in their defense. Because analysts need not have strong scientific grounding, and because the field itself seems not to require falsifiable techniques, BPA reconstructions are in some sense forensic stories for hire, with justice and defendants’ fates hanging in the balance.

Consequences/situation to date

The public is generally made aware of BPA through high-profile criminal cases, procedural television (and even prestige programs like *Dexter*, whose protagonist was employed as a blood spatter expert on staff at a Florida police department), and true-crime genres in all media. The aggregate impression is that of a

rigorous science, though certainly fallible if willfully misconstrued for sensationalist or malicious ends. BPA lets blood tell the story.

But can blood ever speak for itself? Once brought into a courtroom to give expert testimony, bloodstain-pattern analysts are doing the speaking. And by that point, they are conscripted by either the prosecution or the defense, and their interpretations are subject to contextual bias. To be sure, making sense of the physical evidence that violence leaves behind falls firmly within the mandate of the justice system. Bloodstain-pattern analysis nevertheless qualifies as a kind of scripturalizing in that it misdirects attention from the quasiempirical stories *people* are telling by pointing instead to the *inanimate* thing, leftover blood.

Key references

ProPublica's investigative reporting on bloodstain-pattern analysis and the criminal justice system, Blood Will Tell: <https://www.propublica.org/series/blood-will-tell>

National Academy of Science, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*, <https://www.nap.edu/read/12589>
Timeline: "How an Unproven Forensic Science Became a Courtroom Staple," Leora Davis of ProPublica in the *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/31/magazine/bloodstain-pattern-analysis-timeline.html>

Mission Hills Christian Church: A Buoy for some 'Nones

By: Robert James Mason

A young pastor, who was educated at Fuller Theological Seminary, which is the largest multid denominational seminary in the country, serves the church. It was started in the late 1940s by

televangelist Charles Fuller as a conservative institution to train evangelical church leadership with a high degree of academic excellence. It was during his latter high school days in Waco, Texas that he became interested in the questions being raised by a group of evangelical pastors challenging evangelical orthodoxy. This continued into college and seminary education, yet by the time he finished seminary, what has been called the “Emergent church movement” (ECM) had already spent its influence and was in decline. This movement came out of American Evangelicalism in the 90s and after a short, but significant life span, it twilighted as a movement in the early 2000s. Some of the movement’s leading spokespersons including Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Phyllis Tickle, Doug Pagitt, began as pastors of evangelical churches, but were critical of many aspects of evangelicalism. Other important voices played a significant role such as Peter Rollins, a philosopher from Belfast, who had been advocating a different form of community formation. For many the goal was not to establish a new church, but to attempt to reform the church from within over issues such as biblical authority, church polity, cultural engagement and current social issues (gay marriage, role of women, consumer culture, etc.). They disseminated their ideas through Internet connections and social media relationships alongside more standard book publishing and lecture events. In response, the conservative evangelical establishment responded with vitriol, rejection, and isolation. It seems to me that there were unintended consequences as well, such that most of the leaders of the movement lost their pastoral positions. Another consequence that is more relevant to my interest seems to be that many of those who embraced the movement’s ideals became disillusioned with the churches they attended and ended up as what demographers call the “nones.”

As I continue to develop my relationship with Mission Hills Christian Church, I am noticing that a majority of their visitors and new members have personal stories that connect with ‘emergent’ matters. Many even continue to follow the ECM leaders, who still have active blog sites and touring schedules across the country. Many visitors come to MHCC having left the church years before, but not their search for existential meaning. Many of those who

visit the church have broadened their religious horizons beyond their own Christian traditions—explorations in ancient contemplative Christian practices (many resonate with contemplative authors such as Richard Rohr), Buddhist practices, and psychoanalytical practices. MHCC has a strong social media presence and a message that is compatible with ECM interests.

From an ISS perspective, these particular “nones” have become disillusioned with the fundamentalist approach to scripture, the detachment of their religious tradition to current social concerns, the occluding of systemic racism and sexism, along with the hegemony with current political power regime—what those involved with the ISS identify as scripturalization. Through their encounter with the ECM, they have become aware of the ways that scriptural texts have been narrowly interpreted to serve as a power platform to maintain traditional American cultural traditions and statues of cultural power embedded in the church as well as their own tacit approval of the power dynamics involved. Yet they have not lost their interest in religion or Christianity—I hear them speak repeatedly about dichotomous categories of religious/spiritual, institutional/personal, and such, as ways of recreating their religious self-identity. They continue to incorporate the Christian bible as they scripturalize, but the hermeneutics are different and the foundational texts have been augmented to include such items as ancient contemplative texts, modern monastics, enneagram texts, yoga classes, retreats, environmental concerns, etc.). Even the way the church presents itself (generated by the pastor primarily) is designed to resonate with this subset of nones—social media presence, guest speakers, religious blogs, solar panels, art exhibits, etc.

So I am interested in their journeys and the ways they have chosen to process their disillusionment and reconstruct their self-identities in relation to what they identify as Christian, which interestingly enough is not disillusionment with politics and religion but how that relationship is re-configured. What work does this church's practices perform that gives these individuals the safe space to reconfigure their self-identity?

Atlanta's Cyclorama

By Rosamond C. Rodman

In the United States, the twenty-first century dawned on debates over Confederate monuments and symbols. In South Carolina, the Confederate flag that had flown above the state's capitol since 1962 was taken down (2000); at Yale University's Calhoun College (named for Vice-President and pro-slavery activist John C. Calhoun), employee Corey Menafee used a broomstick to break a stained glass window that depicted slaves with large baskets of cotton atop their heads (2016), reigniting an ongoing debate about renaming the college. Citizens of Charlottesville, Virginia have been fighting about what to do with the statue of Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. Protests in August of 2017 turned violent, leading to the death of a young woman, Heather Heyer. The statues to date remain in place, protected by state law. In 2018, Atlanta's mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms signed a bill that changed the names of several "Confederate Avenues." Now, what to do with Atlanta's Cyclorama?

In the late nineteenth century, before the advent of motion pictures, cycloramas were a popular form of visual entertainment. Enormous circular paintings (four-hundred feet long, fifty feet high) that wrapped around the interior of a rotunda, visitors viewed these panoramic paintings from a raised platform in the center. Their scale and circularity effectively embedded the viewer within the painting, an illusion amplified by slightly bending the canvas away from the wall at a mid-point, using lighting, music, sound effects and narration, and later, by staging a diorama at the base of the painting with real mounds of dirt, human figures, railroad tracks, and shrubbery.

These effects pleasurably confused the visitor's sense of space and time, offering an early version of virtual reality. So compelling was the sense of being "in" the painting that Benjamin Harrison, running for president in 1888, managed to convince a manager of the Atlanta's Cyclorama to paint Harrison in as a general on the battlefield. When the film *Gone with the Wind* premiered in Atlanta in 1939, the movie's star Clark Gable mentioned that the

Cyclorama could be made even more impressive with the addition of his likeness as a fallen Rhett Butler, so his pencil-thin mustache, jaunty grin, and dark brows were daubed onto one of the mannequins in the diorama, where he may still be found.



The diorama at the base of the painting confuses the viewers' sense of dimension.
Photo by the author.

Not surprisingly, panoramic paintings like Atlanta's have been regarded as rather obvious "sites of cultural dominance."³ Nor

3. Shelly Jarenski, "'Delighted and Instructed': African American Challenges to Panoramic Aesthetics in J. P. Ball, Kara Walker, and Frederick Douglass," *American Quarterly* 65:1 (March 2013), 126.

is it surprising that many such paintings depicted famous Civil War battles. Cycloramas became popular at the exact moment that control of how the Civil War was to be remembered and commemorated was up for cultural grabs. Though few such paintings survive to the present day, there were cycloramas depicting the Battle of Gettysburg, the Battle of Shiloh, the Second Battle of Bull Run, and so on. The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama is one of two that remain. It depicts a day-long battle in 1862 credited as a crucial tipping point in the Union's eventual victory. Conceived by German immigrant William Wehner, and painted by a team of artists at the American Panorama Studio in Milwaukee, it originally reflected a reconcili-ationist perspective, highlighting the courage and commitment of soldiers on both sides by freezing the action just as Confederates have broken through the Union lines. It is true that the Union's most famous general, Jack Logan appears as the largest figure in the painting, but General Sherman is hardly more than a dot on the horizon and most of the painting depicts both Confederate and Union soldiers fighting heroically. There is one Black figure in the painting. In 1893, Georgia businessmen purchased the painting in advance of the Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895. They hastily arranged to have a scene depicting Union soldiers leading a troop of Confederate prisoners re-painted to make it seem that the Union soldiers were fleeing the battle in terror. When it opened to the public, the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper proudly declared the painting was "the only one in existence where the Confederates get the best of things."⁴

By the 1970s, the Cyclorama needed extensive and expensive repairs. Ripped, dirty, and covered in places with a crackly layer of dried buttermilk (used to tamp down the shine of paint), it was largely ignored. As Grant Park, the neighborhood in which it was housed, became integrated many whites fled for the suburbs and "tried to take the Cyclorama with them, fearing that blacks would overrun their 'Shrine to the Confederacy' and arguing that the painting would fare better alongside the newly completed con-

4. Daniel Judt, "Atlanta's Civil War Monument, Minus the Pro-Confederate Bunkum," *The Atlantic*, March 17, 2019.

federate memorial at Stone Mountain.”⁵ Maynard Jackson, Atlanta’s first black mayor, barred the door. He regarded the Cyclorama as a cultural asset. In defense of his efforts to preserve it, he quipped, “I see no irony. Suffice it to say: Look who won the battle.”⁶ So the panoramic painting remained in Grant Park.

In 2018, the painting was moved to the newly built, state-of-the-art Atlanta History Center (AHC) in Buckhead, a majority white, wealthy neighborhood. Thanks to a philanthropist’s \$10 million gift, the painting was restored; the philanthropist intended for the AHC to present the Cyclorama as “the death knell of the Confederacy” leading directly “to the Civil Rights movement.”⁷ The AHC curators crafted a presentation experience that emphasized the painting as an artifact of history rather than a depiction of it. The AHC promises that for \$21.50, visitors can now view “*The Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama painting as it was originally intended to be viewed—an experience no one has seen or felt in nearly 100 years.”⁸

Atlanta’s cyclorama offers several points of consideration for those interested in dominant and dominating cultural scripts. One is the profound pleasure that viewers took in its immersive, embodied, and participatory aspect; the confusion of place and time and the sense of being embedded in the action the painting depicts. Another is the notable variedness of interpretation, the malleability of its placement and presentation. Made to walk the “tightrope between the ideals of the New South and the Lost Cause” forms of Confederate commemoration, does the painting depict a city “too busy to hate,” the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, or does it showcase Atlanta’s Confederate past, its roadways still

5. Daniel Judt, “Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument,” *Southern Cultures* (Summer 2017), 36.

6. The Atlanta Constitution 2/27/79.

7. Quoted in Judt, “Cyclorama,” 42.

8. <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/explore/exhibitions/cyclorama-the-big-picture> accessed Jan. 31, 2020.

gridded by segregation?⁹

Lest it be forgotten, the Atlanta cyclorama is now and always has been a money-making enterprise. Those who controlled the purse strings have always controlled its presentation. Atlanta's most famous painting depicts a battle, sure: over power and the production of history and social memory, over who and what is represented (and how), and over who controls that representation. Like the painting itself, this latest rendition is but a moment in a fight that isn't over.

9. The quote is from Christopher Adameczyk, "Confederate Memory In a Post-Confederate Atlanta – a Prolegomena," *Journal of American Studies* 51: 2 (2017); 147. On Atlanta's roads, see Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); see also his "How Segregation Caused Your Traffic Jam," in *The New York Times* 1619 project, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/traffic-atlanta-segregation.html>

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